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THE THERAPEUTIC VALUE OF HYPNOTISM.

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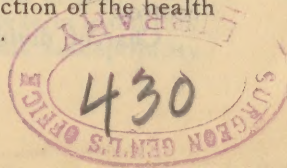
Hypnotism, the science of the sleep-like state, is a term which has been applied to a class of extremely interesting phenomena which have their origin in the disorder of some of the most complex functions of the human organism, and which are dependent upon the social relationship of humanity. The influence exerted by one social unit upon another is the necessary outgrowth of their association and the varying structural arrangement and functional activity among them. This influence has been recognized as far back as the records of civilization extend.

About 125 years ago, Mesmer, in France, gave prominence to the subject through his study and exhibition of its phenomena, and termed it animal magnetism. The term hypnotism was first applied by Braid about the year 1840, though he held to the belief that the phenomena of mesmerism and those of hypnotism, though analogous, were not identical in character. Within the past twenty-five years the subject has received more attention from scientific investigators, and this scientific study of it has extended more rapidly since, in 1878, Charcot began its public investigation. The influence of his name has diffused a world-wide interest in its phenomena, and has given it a respectability which it did not command previously. The establishing of a second school in France soon afterwards, at Nancy, has added the influence of controversy to its investigation, and the result is that we have since that date a perfect flood of literature and an army of experimenters, all engaged in at-

tempts to develop its wonderful phenomena and to explain, in one manner or another, their origin and relations to the physical organism, and all pursuing the subject from a desire to investigate the "scientific" relations of its manifestations. Binet, Fere, Weinhold, Heidenhain, Möbius, Benedikt, Meyersohn, Bernheim, Voisin, Obersteiner, Fränkel, Björnström, Kraft-Ebing, Forel and Dessoir are but a few of the many who have given us, in one form or another, the results of their study of it, and encouraged the "common horde" to seek to add their modicum to the solution of its mysteries.

The recital of these names is sufficient to indicate the prominence which the medical profession has assumed in this investigation. This is naturally and rightfully their province, and the scientific investigation of this class of phenomena belongs of necessity to their field of labor.

With the popularization of the subject, however, the extension of the reports of investigators to non-professional literature and the public exhibition of experimentation, there has arisen the necessity for a careful consideration of the responsibilities of the medical profession in relation to the entire subject and of their correct attitude towards its investigation. The present exhibition of interest in the subject in our midst and the cause of this interest will suffice to indicate the necessity for defining clearly what our position is and giving the weight of our influence to the protection of the health and morals of society.



I may state further that the purpose of this paper is not to give a description of the phenomena of hypnotism, nor to attempt an explanation of these further than these subjects are necessary to a correct appreciation of our relation as medical men to it. The study of the mass of literature which we possess will suffice to establish, first, the existence of the hypnotic influence, and secondly, the difficulties which exist in any attempt to interpret its manifestations. It opens up the whole field of the reliability of testimony and the relationship of mental and physical phenomena. There will be no attempt made to delve into the mysteries of our psychic nature. It is with physical structures and physical phenomena that we have to deal, and as physicians the mental activities are of interest to us only in so far as they disclose the conditions of the physical substructure, and so far as the activity of the one may influence the well-being of the other. It matters not to us, as medical advisers, what views our patients may hold of the relationship of spiritual energy to physical structures so long as such belief does not jeopardize the well-being of the latter nor impair in any manner its functional energy.

The etymology of the term hypnotism implies the existence of what is probably its most essential characteristic, to wit, a confusion or an absolute loss of consciousness. It is true that a few of the minor phenomena of the hypnotic state may be induced with but slight, if any, perceptible impairment of consciousness, but the fact remains that confusion of consciousness is the essential feature of it, and the extent of this confusion is in exact ratio to the degree of the hypnotic influence. The higher functions of the mind are in abeyance. The more automatic actions become prominent. The reflexes are always disturbed and often exaggerated, as they are in disease when the influence of the higher centres is cut off. The interference of function, in other words, is similar to the loss of function which results from disease of the higher brain centres.

Charcot divides the degree of the

hypnotic influence into three stages, the cataleptic, the lethargic, and the somnambulistic. These are not distinct and consecutive. Either may be primary, resulting directly from the methods used to induce the hypnotic state, or follow either of the other stages. They are, in fact, not degrees, but simply three forms, either of which may be the predominating type in any given case or instance. The functional inactivity of the higher centres is further shown in the physical signs which accompany the various types.

The modification and frequent exaggeration of the reflexes has been already referred to. There may be complete relaxation or such extreme irritability as to induce muscular rigidity upon the slightest impression. Cutaneous sensibility is always disordered. The sense of touch is often heightened or diminished, but there is constantly an insensibility to pain.

The susceptibility of the special senses is equally disordered. The sense of sight may be rendered so acute that retinal impressions are perceived, which at other times are entirely insufficient to cause any sensation. In other instances there is inability to perceive what is plainly evident to others, the retina appearing quite insensible to the ordinary impressions of light. Each of the other special senses may be similarly disturbed.

In fact, the modifications which may exist in every avenue through which impressions reach, the sensorium are as numerous as the structures render possible.

The Italian experimenters, Tamburini and Sapelli have noticed changes in respiration and circulation which seemed to be quite constant—"stronger respiratory movements during the lethargic state, and weaker during the cataleptic; vascular dilatation during the former, and vascular contraction during the latter. On transition from one to the other, respiration is sometimes greatly disturbed, at times stopping for as much as one minute."

It is a significant fact that the exaggeration of the reflexes through which muscular rigidity is effected or

spasm produced, has a great tendency to persist. For instance, the stroking of the limbs which, from the hyper-æsthetic state of the skin and the heightened reflex produces reflex spasm, has been known to induce a sensitive state which remains for two or three days. The great hyper-æsthesia and the extreme impressibility of the special senses are a sufficient explanation of many of the remarkable phenomena of the hypnotic state.

While the cataleptic and lethargic states contribute many interesting symptoms, it is in the somnambulistic state particularly, that these wonderful phenomena most abound, and this is largely explained by the fact that in the former states the susceptibility to impressions is usually diminished, while in the latter it is heightened in nearly all directions. By careful experiments, Beausis, of Nancy, has found increased power of hearing, both as to the intensity of the sound and the speed of its transmission (time of reaction). Taquet exhibited before the medico-psychological society of Paris, about three years ago, a young girl of the hysteric type, who displayed in a remarkable degree the heightened sensibility of the special senses of sight and smell.

Among the psychical symptoms of the hypnotic state after confusion of consciousness, modification of the faculty of memory is perhaps the most significant. It may be greatly heightened in power or much diminished. The usual condition is that the subject does not remember the circumstances of the hypnotic state after awakening from it, but can recall them with remarkable accuracy when re-hypnotized. In other words, as some writers claim, there seems to be two separate forms of life, the normal wakeful life, and the somnambulistic life; each with its own line of impressions and its independent power of recalling them. The sharpened memory of the hypnotic state explains many of the wonderful mental phenomena displayed by hypnotics. Long forgotten events are recalled. Knowledge once possessed, even imperfectly, is restored in more than its pristine clearness, and the hypnotic

seems to possess powers which have no rational interpretation.

Apparently inconsistent with the claim of confusion of consciousness is the fact that the intellect is in close relationship in its modification by the hypnotic influence, with the state of the special senses and general sensibility, and the memory. In the lethargic form it also sleeps; in the cataleptic form it is in a condition of automatism or passive receptivity, while in the somnambulistic stage there is a distinct personality, likes, dislikes, sympathies and antipathies, and all the component parts of character—under a certain form of restraint, however, and perverted from their normal relationships, and different in quality from those of the individual in his waking state. Often just as the senses are more acute and the sensibility quickened, so the imagination is more brilliant, the judgment more rapid and the whole psychic nature attuned to a higher state of exaltation.

All this is not inconsistent with the concomitant impairment of consciousness. With all the heightened acuteness and increased functional capacity of tissues and exaltation of mental faculties, the fact remains that the individuality of the subject is perverted, the most complex, the latest evolved and the highest function of organic life, the power of conscious analysis and independent reasoning from cause to effect is in abeyance, lost to the individual. He descends to a lower level in the scale of evolution. The stable instability, the fine equipoise in which acuteness of the receptive faculty is tempered by conscious comparison of effects is lost, and the safeguard of the organism is placed elsewhere than in the individual himself.

A necessary property of the essential physical tissue in the evolution of nervous energy is its capacity to react under stimulation. This requires in it a delicate adjustment of molecules, which will admit of their ready displacement and rearrangement upon the application of force. The working capacity of these elements depends upon this susceptibility. The term instability has been applied to this susceptibility

to impressions, and other conditions being properly correlated, the energizing capacity of the nervous tissue will be in direct ratio to the degree of this instability. But this is not the only property of nervous tissue which is essential to the highest good of the animal economy. There must accompany this power of response to stimulus, a control and direction of this response. This is the latest acquired property of the machinery which evolves the psychic functions. It is intimately related to consciousness and the independent identity of the ego. It is the rudder of the ship, the balance-wheel of the mechanism, the stable phase of the instability. Without it the ship would drift upon the rocks, the machinery expend its force in fitful helplessness, and the instability, which should be the power enabling it to overcome the conditions inimical to its welfare, would become the curse of the organization. This has been called the power of inhibition, which is the physiological term to express the psychological faculty of self-control. The relationship which this sustains to consciousness, is shown in the fact that the latter can never be impaired without interfering with the normal exercise of the former.

Hypnotism, the hypnotic state, or the hypnotic influence, no matter in how slight a degree it may exist, requires the perversion of this function, the loss, in greater or less degree, and for the time being, at least, of this property of nervous tissue.

This brings us to the consideration of a subject which is closely allied to the subject of hypnotism, and in the influence of which is to be found its chief power. It has been called suggestion, and in general terms is the substitution of the influence of another individuality for the power of inhibition which the organism itself possessed. It is exceedingly difficult to define it accurately. Björnström call it "every operation which in a living being causes some involuntary effect, the impulse to which passes through the intellect." The latter is a definition of the property as it exists generally in organic life,

while the former is limited to suggestion as applied to the hypnotic state—the hypnotic suggestibility. There is in the former the element of automatism included in the latter, but the cause of the "involuntary effect" is much more limited, being restricted to the act of another individual. Instead of being "every operation which causes some involuntary effect," it is every act of one individual which develops involuntary action in another, in each instance the impulse passing "through the intellect."

The action of the intellect is normally conscious and deliberate, the movement having origin in an impression, and being accompanied by a sense of the real relation which obtains between the impulse and the resultant action. In the hypnotic state this is so modified that the action of the intellect, while deliberate, is not fully conscious and there is a want of knowledge of the relationship existing between the intellectual operation, the resultant act and the impulse which evolved these. Even as thus limited, hypnotic suggestibility is not entirely restricted to the hypnotic state. Hypnotic suggestion, that is suggestion resulting in involuntary action, the impulse to which is through an intellectual operation, may be exercised with no other symptom of hypnosis following than this automatic act. As medical students we have probably all experienced in some degree the symptoms of the disease with which our attention was then engaged in our text-books. Bernheim mentions an instance where, by suggestion, such a degree of insensibility to pain was produced that five teeth were extracted without pain, no other evidences whatever being present of the hypnotic influence. "Before the Biological Society of Paris, Botty exhibited healthy and wakeful persons who, by merely an energetic assurance, or by some anointing, could be rapidly made mute, blind, deaf, insensible to odors, or stricken with palsy, contracture or anæsthesia."⁽¹⁾

It is, however, true that these possi-

bilities exist only in persons who are unusually susceptible to the hypnotic influence or have been frequently submitted to it.

Another very significant fact, which it is well to seriously consider, in our study of this question, is that the influence, which the hypnotizer acquires over his subjects, during hypnosis, often continues to a certain extent in their waking hours, and when they are living their usual life (Björnström). A ready susceptibility to suggestion, that is a weakened power of resistance, is an indication of a fertile soil for the development of hypnosis. "Weak, sensitive, helpless and dependent natures are most susceptible, both to suggestion and to hypnosis, while strong thinkers and cold, practical men are the most discouraging subjects"¹ From this it will be rightfully inferred that all persons are not influenced alike by hypnosis, and that the possibility of its induction varies in different individuals. In all forms of the hypnotic influence, however, there is this ready submission to suggestion, and the hypnotic capability of an individual can be determined by the degree in which this susceptibility exists.

Hypnotic suggestibility depends first, upon the presence of extreme, or at least more than the usual, instability of the cellular nervous elements, and secondly, upon a weak power of inhibition or control of the activity of these elements.

Persons of a low order of intellect are not favorable subjects for hypnosis, because there is such a degree of stability of these elements, which comes from these simpler organization and deficient differentiation, that but little inhibitory control is necessary to preserve in order such functional power as they may possess. Persons of strong individuality are not prone to susceptibility, because, though they may possess the delicate molecular adjustment of nervous tissue, which enables them to respond readily to impressions, they also possess that more highly evolved function, which gives them

conscious control of this impressibility. The insane are unfavorable subjects because the dominance of fixed ideas, or the impairment of the power of attention, is antagonistic to the hypnotic suggestibility which is so essential to the development of its manifestations.

Finally, for us the practical consideration is what, if any, are the medical uses of hypnosis?

There can be no doubt that its phenomena are such that it may enable us to overcome at times some of the symptoms of disease, or to successfully utilize it in the protection of patients from injurious influences during the removal of diseased processes. The anæsthesia which is its usual accompaniment, has been advantageously used in minor surgical operations. It has been utilized for the relief of insomnia due to pain, neuralgia and other painful affections. Hypnosis is also doubtless advantageous wherever symptoms of disease are due to functional perversion alone, if such an unscientific assumption is ever admissible, at least where the symptoms are dependent upon perverted habits in the tissues, and are therefore removable by psychic influence. Further, the physician daily makes use of suggestion in his practice, but it is not hypnotism. He induces mental states in his patients favorable to their restoration through the inspiration of confidence in his superior intelligence, but this confidence and consequent acquiescence in the physician's instructions, has a basis which appeals to the conscious reason of the patient, and is in no sense involuntary. It is in no sense similar to the hypnotic influence, and consequently has no weight in considering the therapeutic value of hypnosis.

The questions to decide in the latter are: Are we justified in making use of hypnotic suggestion and hypnotic influence for the removal of such symptoms of disease and such diseased processes, perchance, as are amenable to it? Are there any injurious results attendant upon its use? Do we encounter any risk of inflicting injury upon our patients by its use? If we do encounter risk, are we justified in taking

¹ Björnström, p. 46.

this risk in view of the other results of its use which are beneficial to the patient?

To determine this let us state one or two principles which I believe to be axiomatic. First, given a normal development of the susceptibility of cellular nervous tissue to impressions, the power of inhibition or control of this impressibility or instability is never in excess in any individual. Secondly, a deficiency in this inhibitory control is the source of multitudes of the evils which befall humanity. Thirdly, a whole class of disorders of the nervous system, especially in its psychic areas, have their source in an imperfect evolution of this controlling function. Space will not permit an argument or further description of these.

It follows from the acceptance of these axioms that whatever tends to diminish the influence of this inhibitory function, in so far as it does this, cannot possibly be, in that respect, of benefit to the organization, but must necessarily result in positive injury. That the hypnotic influence impairs this inhibitory function is shown by many circumstances of its use. All are not alike susceptible to it. Where the susceptibility does not exist originally in marked degree, it may be increased by frequent submission to it. With every repetition the command of the hypnotizer becomes more firmly established, the submission of the subject is more complete and abject, and the process more involuntary. The hypnotic susceptibility is greatest during the period adolescence and before the highest functional capacity of the nervous system has been attained, when it has not been completely differentiated either in tissue or function.

These facts should lead us to consider carefully the advantages claimed for its use and to compare these with the dangers encountered, which, on the foregoing assumption, must be conceded. As far as my reading on the subject extends, either all the remedial effects claimed for it can be secured by other less dangerous means, or the symptoms sought to be removed are not sufficiently damaging in their influence

on the organism to justify the use of a dangerous remedy.

It is doubtless true that in certain cases, and in experienced and cautious hands, beneficial results are obtained where the desperate character of the case and the failure of all other means of treatment justify its use in that particular instance. But the temptation to extend its experimental use is so great and the deleterious influence is so insidious that it is doubtful whether it can be said to be a safe remedy in any case in the hands of the average practitioner.

There is but one class of cases where its use *ad libitum* is probably justified, and that is in persons who already possess such defective inhibition as to be in a pathological state. In these, though the hypnotic influence is difficult to establish, when successfully done, it sometimes leads to such a fixation of conduct in a right direction as results in decided benefit. This is, however, where a pathological deficiency already exists, and consequently where the risk of adding to the disorder is less.

Knowing, further, the stream of evil effects which flows from the impairment of the conscious and fully voluntary control of nervous impressibility, we should guard against this danger by every means in our power. It is not alone that the frequent repetition of hypnosis renders the subject more susceptible to it, but it endangers his independent activity at other times and in other directions. He is rendered more helpless, more amenable to injurious influences, and is less able within himself to overcome those features of his environment which are inimical to his well-being. He is made more and more the easy prey to designing and evilly-disposed individuals, has less power of resistance, and less conscious control of his activities.

The nature of the suggestion in the hypnotic state has much to do with the immediate effect which it may have upon the subject. When this is such as to lead to phenomena of advantage to the hypnotized individual, this immediate effect may not be injurious. The secondary effect, even under such cir-

cumstances, cannot but be detrimental, because of the increasing weakness in the conscious volition of the individual and his readier submission to other control. It is the involuntary feature of this submission, and its blind, unreasoning and semi-unconscious character which is its most injurious element. No more pitiable object can be imagined than the individual who, while possessing at least ordinary capacity, goes through life in helpless incompetency simply because he is wafted about by every wind that blows, the prey to every designing influence.

That there is an actual molecular change and expenditure of energy is shown in the exhaustion which follows the subjection of an individual to the hypnotic influence.

Taking this view of the medical uses of hypnosis, it is scarcely necessary for

me to say that I would condemn the public exhibition of hypnotism entirely. In addition to the injurious effects of such exhibitions upon the subjects of the experiments, the public display of the phenomena encourages credulity, bigotry and charlatanry among the people. The difficulty in interpreting the phenomena, and the inability of the ordinary mind to comprehend such interpretation as is at present possible, tends to deepen injuriously the mystery which surrounds the functions of organic life. It heightens superstition, impairs the intelligent use of the power of analysis and the deliberate and fully conscious control of the reason and judgment. There is nothing to be said in favor of it. At best it can but gratify idle or morbid curiosity at the expense of helpless subjects, and is unworthy of the countenance of a learned profession.

